

Leeds Learning Alliance

Statement in support of black women following the revelations about hateful, racist, and misogynistic comments made by Leeds businessman Frank Hester about Diane Abbott MP

Violence against women and girls and incidents of racially motivated hate crimes are increasing. The silence when society fails to speak out against racism and against the particularly abhorrent forms of abuse that are directed at women of colour, and more specifically Black women, allows its normalisation. This dehumanising and insidious form of racism, known as misogynoir, has no place in our society. It is imperative that as an organisation, we demonstrate that we will not be complicit in our silence, but that we show that we stand with Black women and girls who are our partners, colleagues, and learners because we are not willing to allow the normalisation of racism within our communities.

The absence of voices publicly speaking out against the violent, racist, and misogynistic words spoken by Leeds based business owner, Frank Hester, which were directed at Diane Abbott MP, has not gone unnoticed. Frank Hester positions himself as a business leader in our city, he makes decisions about employment opportunities and investment, and the company he solely owns is procured to deliver huge public sector health and social care contracts. Such comments make many members of our community, including and especially Black girls and women, feel more vulnerable and unsafe. Yet there has been a constrained and limited response, a lack of leadership in calling out the insidious ways in which racism pervades our society and exemplifies the need for us to acknowledge how the harms of racism must be structurally addressed by those who hold privilege and power.

In the face of hate and intimidation, we need to be clear that we stand actively, tirelessly, and unapologetically against racism. We believe it is not enough to 'not be racist', we call on all leaders, those holding power and members of our communities to make it plain that racism and a failure to address it, is not acceptable.

The end to racial violence in the UK is too slow. The dehumanising impact of the words used against Black women and girls is reflective of a society which has failed to

acknowledge the pernicious and pervasive ways in which racism is embedded in our institutions. Whilst our response comes to address a very specific incident, we recognise that shock and outrage are a privilege of 'whiteness', and that to our colleagues and learners of colour who experience racism in multiple forms, this is a public manifestation of much of their lived reality.

As a multi-racial organisation, we understand that devaluing and dehumanising practices serve as a mechanism to pit communities against each other rather than unite us, but an injury to one should be seen as an injury to all. We implore members of our communities, our partners, collaborators, stakeholders, and the media to educate themselves to understand why racism is a safeguarding issue, one which we commit to openly challenge. We must actively stand by anyone who experiences racism in all its forms and speak up against misogyny, calling out threatening, violent and abusive language and behaviour against women and those who identify as women.

This is not performative allyship, we are an active organisation, committed to embedding anti-racist practice. We also understand that the discourse of individuals whilst abhorrent must be challenged hand-in-hand with broader systemic change to tackle the deeply entrenched institutionally racist practices of our society. We welcome the police investigation of the matter and we have written to Frank Hester, his company, the Prime Minister, the Department of Health, and Social Care who procure NHS contracts, and the Labour Party to convey that the discourse must change if we are to recognise the broad, deep, and traumatising impact that such actions and language have on our communities.

If you would like to join us in developing and implementing our anti-racist work, please contact info@leedslearningalliance.org or Dr Tamsin Bowers-Brown t.bowers-brown@leedstrinity.ac.uk to discuss the work of the LLA Equity Network.

For our colleagues, learners, and communities of colour, we stand together, and we promise that our actions will be purposeful and acted with intent.